

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 TEL AV 05042 121039Z
ACTION SS-25

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O R 120923Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7164
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA

S E C R E T TEL AVIV 5042

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, MILI, LE, US, IS
SUBJECT: US ASSISTANCE IN REBUILDING LEBANESE ARMY

REF: A) STATE 155130, B) STATE 155131, C) TEL AVIV 4951,
D) TEL AVIV 4995 (NOTAL)

1. I HAVE NOW RECEIVED FROM EVRON THE OFFICIAL ISRAELI GOVERNMENT REACTION TO OUR REQUEST OFR THEIR VIEWS ON US ASSISTANCE FOR THE LEBANESE ARMY, WHICH I CONVEYED TO HIM SOME DAYS AGO (REF C). IT WAS CAREFULLY DRAFTED TO BE CONVEYED TO ME AS FOLLOWS.
2. QUOTE: ISRAEL NAVORS THE CREATION OF AN INDEPENDENT LEBANESE ARMY, UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF THE TRADITIONAL LEBANESE STATE AUTHORITIES, WITH ARMS SUPPLY AND A TRAINING CONNECTION WITH UNITED STATES, AS PREFERABLE TO OTHER ALTERNATIVES, SUCH AS SYRIAN TRAINING WITH SOVIET ARMS.

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3. QUOTE: OUR ATTITUDE IS BASED ON THE FOLLOWING ASSUMPTIONS: (A) THAT THIS ARMY WILL EVENTUALLY ASSUME CONTROL OVER ALL LEBANESE TERRITORY, (B) THAT IT WILL REPLACE SYRIAN AND OTHER INTER-ARAB FORCES, BRINGING ABOUT THEIR EARLY WITHDRAWAL, AND (C) IT WILL IMPOSE LAW AND ORDER IN SOUTH LEBANON AND PREVENT THE PRESENCE AND ACTIVITIES OF PALESTINIAN TERRORISTS NEAR THE ISRAELI

BORDER. END QUOTE.

4. COMMENT: I TRIED TO DRAW OUT EVRON ON SOME OF THE OBVIOUS PROBLEMS WITH THIS FORMULATION, BUT HE WAS CLEARLY NOT IN A POSITION TO ELABORATE VERY MUCH. SUBSEQUENTLY, HOWEVER, IN CONVERSATIONS WITH BOTH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN AND FOREIGN MINISTER DAYAN, WHICH ARE REPORTED SEPARATELY, I HAVE COME TO UNDERSTAND MORE CLEARLY THE MEANING OF THE ABOVE. WHAT IT BOILS DOWN TO IS THAT THE ISRAELIS SUPPORT OUR HELPING THE LEBANESE ARMY, AND SEE THAT AS A MUCH MORE DESIRABLE ALTERNATIVE THAN ARAB ASSISTANCE. HOWEVER, THEY ARE OVERWHELMINGLY FOCUSSED ON THEIR INCREASING CONCERN ABOUT THE SLOW BUILD UP OF PALESTINIAN FORCES NEAR THE BORDER. THEY ARE CONVINCED THAT THE SYRIANS--WITHOUT THEMSELVES MOVING SOUTH OF WHERE THEY ARE NOW POSITIONED--COULD STOP THIS FLOW AND REQUIRE THE PALESTINIANS TO PULL BACK. THEY ARE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT ANY POSSIBILITY THAT A NEWLY RECONSTITUTED LEBANESE ARMY, OPERATING TO CARRY OUT IN SOME WAY THE "CAIRO ACCORDS," WOULD MERELY LEGITIMIZE A CONTINUED PALESTINIAN MILITARY PRESENCE ALONG THE FRONTIER RATHER THAN REPLACE IT WITH LEBANESE TROOPS. THEREFORE, THEY WOULD LIKE TO SEE US OBTAIN SOME KIND OF CREDIBLE COMMITMENT FROM THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT IN EXCHANGE FOR OUR ASSISTANCE; TO WIT, THAT WHEN THE NEW LEBANESE FORCE IS STRONG ENOUGH TO PROVIDE

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SOME MINIMALLY CREDIBLE MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE SOUTH THAT IT WILL BE USED TO REPLACE PALESTINIAN UNITS, NOT TO "LIVE WITH THEM."

5. FROM THESE DISCUSSIONS, I HAVE GAINED A DISTINCT IMPRESSION THAT THE ISRAELIS ARE INCREASINGLY WORRIED ABOUT THE LONGER TERM STABILITY IN SOUTH LEBANON, ALTHOUGH THEY REITERATE AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS HERE THAT THEY HAVE NO INTENTION OR DESIRE TO OCCUPY ANY LEBANESE TERRITORY. YET THEY SEE THE PALESTINIAN THREAT FOR A RENEWAL OF CROSS-BORDER OPERATIONS COMING EVER CLOSER AND ARE CLEARLY UNWILLING TO ALLOW IT TO BUILD UP AGAIN WITHOUT THEMSELVES TAKING NECESSARY MILITARY ACTIONS TO BLUNT THAT THREAT. BOTH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN AND FOREIGN MINISTER DAYAN BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT TO TRY TO TALK OUT THIS QUESTION WITH PRESIDENT CARTER DURING THE BEGIN VISIT, AND TO ACHIEVE A BETTER COORDINATED UNDERSTANDING OF US AND ISRAELI POLICY CONCERNS. I ALSO THINK THIS IS A KEY MOMENT TO HAVE SUCH CONVERSATIONS, BEFORE THE FORCE OF EVENTS AND THE POLITICAL DRIFT IN LEBANON INDUCES ISRAEL TO TAKE STRONGER MEASURES IN WHAT IT WILL CONCEIVE TO BE ITS ESSENTIAL

INTERESTS OF SELF-DEFENSE.

LEWIS

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NNN

Message Attributes

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